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## **PUBLIC INPUT TO SHAPE SALTON SEA REVITALIZATION LAND USE DECISIONS**

*Master Development Plan Community Workshops Complete*

*El Centro* – Respect the rights of existing residents, attract eco-tourism, encourage job creation and protect cultural resources — these were consistent themes heard during the Salton Sea Authority’s Master Development Plan public workshop series last month.

A new milestone in the latest phase of planning for the revitalization of the Salton Sea was reached when the Authority’s consultant completed a series of workshops designed to take input on what stakeholders would like considered in the Master Development Plan (MDP). A follow-on document to the Salton Sea Revitalization Plan, the MDP will assess development potential around the sea, including changes in land use and intensity and associated infrastructure needs.

To ensure a good turnout, the workshops were held throughout the region in the afternoon and evenings on three days. Meetings were held in Brawley, Salton City, La Quinta and El Centro. A separate workshop was also held with the Torres Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indian Tribe. For land use planners, public input is an integral part of designing planning documents that reflect each region or community’s unique character.

Russell Hunt with Mooney-Jones Stokes, the Authority’s planning consultant out of San Diego, was happy to hear what stakeholders had to say.

“The workshops were exciting because we received so many great comments. Many were ideas we simply hadn’t thought about.” Water taxis, floating resorts and in-sea island/reef fisheries were among the requests.

Many common concerns were heard at the meetings. General themes, however, emerged at each location. For Brawley, preserving habitat, natural resources, eco-tourism and agriculture was important. In Salton City, comments included consideration for existing residents, preserving views and improving public services and infrastructure.

In La Quinta, North Shore comments included a variety of issues, including the expansion of the existing airport, providing affordable housing for seniors and young families, reclaiming water, preserving and enhancing fisheries, and creating high-quality jobs and a sustained revenue source for infrastructure. Input received at the El Centro workshop was similar, equally diverse and included a discussion about accommodating the high demand for off-road vehicle recreation.

Torres Martinez tribal members present at the meeting supported the consultant's idea of creating "seaside villages" around the Sea. Designed to discourage sprawl, these villages would provide a compact community with a core commercial center and mixed uses. Input from the tribe included creating an alternative transportation corridor for State Route 86, encouraging educational opportunities, creating commercial and industrial development, preserving the solitude of the local environment and providing for development of entertainment destinations on tribal land.

"We received a lot of constructive input. Public comments will go a long way in ensuring that we capture the full range of needs and desires of stakeholders in the region," said Ron Enzweiler, Salton Sea Authority Executive Director.

The next step will be for the consultant to take the input from the workshops and incorporate them into the MDP. An initial draft intended to spark discussion will be presented at the December 8th Salton Sea Authority Board of Directors meeting. Discussions and comments from local planners and more input from the public on the MDP will be sought early next year.

The MDP, as well as the Economic Benefits Study and Infrastructure Financing Plan, is expected to show that the development around the Sea will generate the funds needed to finance the Sea's restoration. The construction and operation of a restored and revitalized Sea are expected to result in positive economic effects on communities immediately adjacent to the shoreline of the Sea as well as other parts of Imperial and Riverside Counties.

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*The Salton Sea Authority is a joint powers agency chartered by the State of California for the purpose of ensuring continued beneficial uses of the Salton Sea. The Authority is composed of five local agencies: Coachella Valley Water District, Imperial Irrigation District, County of Imperial, County of Riverside and the Torres Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indian Tribe. The Authority was formed to work with California state agencies, federal agencies, and the Republic of Mexico to develop programs that would continue beneficial use of the Salton Sea. See [www.saltonsea.ca.gov](http://www.saltonsea.ca.gov) for more information.*